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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 RIYADH 002515

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DEPT. PLEASE PASS TO NSC FOR CCAMPONOVO, DOD FOR ALIOTTA,
DOJ FOR TMONHEIM, S/WCI FOR AMORRISON, DRL FOR KMCGEENEY,
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SUBJECT: SAUDIS REHABILITATE GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: The Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI) presented a two-day orientation of its de-radicalization and rehabilitation program for extremists to an inter-agency delegation (NSC/DOS/DOD/DOJ), Embassy Pol-Mil, LEGAT, BPM and Pol staff. The SAG has invested considerable resources personnel, financial, and leadership time in their program, and although proud of the results to date, MOI officials were quick to point out that they are still learning and adjusting. They noted that as al-Qaeda continues to change its approach to try and counter the program,s success, they must be flexible enough to adjust the program. Throughout the visit they reaffirmed assurances that they will take all necessary and appropriate efforts to ensure these individuals do not pose a future security risk and treat them humanely while in Saudi custody. The orientation concluded with a late-night meeting with Assistant Minister of Interior for Security Affairs Prince Muhammad bin Naif (MBN) to review additional detainee-related issues. END SUMMARY.

DE-RADICALIZATION OF TERRORISTS

¶2. (U) The Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI), in conjunction with the Ministries of Culture, Islamic Affairs, Education and Social Affairs, is conducting an active campaign to counter terrorism, extremist thought and propaganda, and terrorist recruitment within the Kingdom. Their goal is to prevent Saudis, especially young men, from becoming radicalized. Concurrently, they have instituted an extensive de-radicalization and rehabilitation program, led by MOI, to change the attitudes of Saudis who have been involved in terrorism (including detainees transferred from U.S. custody at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and those detained locally for terrorist activities).

¶3. (S) On December 9-10, MOI officials provided a comprehensive orientation of this program, with emphasis on what the Saudis are doing to de-radicalize and rehabilitate returned Guantanamo detainees, to an inter-agency delegation (NSC/DOS/DOD/DOJ). Embassy Pol-Mil, LEGAT, BPM and Pol staff accompanied this team. The two main issues addressed by MOI officials were the SAG,s efforts to ensure these individuals no longer posed security risks and assurances that they were treated humanely while in the Kingdom,s custody. The SAG

went to great lengths during this visit to allay USG concerns in both areas.

¶4. (S) Mabath Director of Public Affairs General Yusef Mansoor led the two-day orientation, which included both briefings and first-ever visits to MOI facilities. The MOI began with two detailed briefings on the SAG's information campaign and its detainee de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs by program director Dr. Hadlaq, director of the rehabilitation program Sheikh Ahmed al-Jalaani, and lead psychologist Dr. al-Otayan. These programs focus on a strategy of prevention, rehabilitation, and after-release care, with oversight by MOI officials during all stages. The de-radicalization program encompasses detainees still being held in prison, while the rehabilitation program takes place at what MOI officials described as a half-way house. While these programs were designed and conducted by the MOI, large-scale family participation was an essential element, intended to re-integrate alienated former extremists back into mainstream Saudi society.

¶5. (S) The delegation heard from members of the MOI's rehabilitation Advisory Committee, a committee composed of psychologists, religious leaders, Mabath officers, and other MOI officials, which supervises the de-radicalization program in MOI prisons. The committee tracks the progress of each detainee in the program and determines whether they are ready to move from MOI custody in prison to the rehabilitation center and whether, ultimately, they are ready to be released back into Saudi society. The Advisory Committee has thus far overseen de-radicalization efforts for approximately 3200 detainees, though only approximately 1500

RIYADH 00002515 002 OF 005

of those detainees have been released from MOI custody to date. MOI officials emphasized that only those deemed suitable would be enrolled in the follow-on rehabilitation program, while all others would remain in MOI custody. Additionally, no detainee can enter the rehabilitation program until he completes any prison sentence he has received. Detainees remain in the de-radicalization program for a minimum of six months, though the program has no fixed length. Though pleased with their success to date, MOI officials recognize that it's an ongoing process and needs continued vigilance. Saudi officials report a recidivism rate of approximately 8-9% from domestic terrorists, though Saudi MOI officials have seen no former Guantanamo detainees "return to the fight" to date. Of note is that all detainees will likely remain under the powerful MOI's radar screen. MOI is intelligently exploiting tribal and clan ties to ensure these individuals, even when released from MOI custody, will still be tracked and monitored, for likely the rest of their lives, to ensure they do not return to jihad.

¶6. (S) According to the MOI, all detainees returned from Guantanamo go through an initial 6-8 week processing by the MOI upon their return and are held in an MOI prison. During this period, they are interrogated regarding their activities, and the MOI decides what kind of legal case will be made against them. Their file, which includes a statement by the detainee regarding his activities, is reviewed by a judge who will then determine if a crime had been committed, and if so, what punishment will be imposed. Most detainees are initially charged with immigration violations and/or use of false documents to leave the Kingdom. However, more serious charges may also be filed, if the MOI investigation uncovers any evidence of actual terrorist activity. During this period, the detainees are initially enrolled in the de-radicalization program which.

¶7. (S) The delegation also visited MOI's Al Hajan prison, a newly built, state-of-the-art detention facility that will be used for those detained for terrorist activities. This extremely secure facility will also provide decent living conditions for its inmates and allow for the detainees,

lawyers and the National Society for Human Rights to have access to the detainees. The facility can hold 1,200 prisoners -- 320 in single cells and the remaining in 6-person cells, and will replace an older MOI prison in Riyadh. The general prison population in the Al Hajan facility will be divided into groups according to assessed threat, such that there is a prison wing for takfiri, for younger prisoners, for those undergoing rehabilitation, etc. All detainees transferred from Guantanamo will initially be held in the facility though they will be housed separately from the general population. The Advisory Committee will manage the de-radicalization program for suitable prisoners and will select those prisoners who will be eligible for the rehabilitation program. The MOI has also built 4 other new facilities similar to the Al Hajan prison in other regions of the country, in order to more effectively handle the extremist prison population and also ensure they are held in relative proximity to their family, which increases the family's ability to play a significant role in the de-radicalization effort a key element of the MOI program.

18. (U) The SAG is conducting an aggressive information campaign within the Kingdom to counter extremist propaganda and deter recruitment into Al-Qaeda. This campaign involves the use of the internet, religious sermons, education programs and literature, along with social outreach by psychologists, civic leaders, tribal sheikhs and imams. The positive treatment received by detainees and their successful response to the overall rehabilitation process are an important part of this campaign.

EMPHASIS ON REHABILITATION

19. (U) In conjunction with information operations and de-radicalization programs being used within the MOI prison, MOI has also established a halfway house in eastern Riyadh to house its follow-on rehabilitation program. This program is for those prisoners the MOJ clears for release from MOI

RIYADH 00002515 003 OF 005

custody and whom the MOI Advisory Committee deems to be sufficiently de-radicalized and suitable for rehabilitation, but who still need more work in a permissive environment before outright release from custody. While at the halfway house, these individuals, mostly former detainees from Guantanamo and jihadis returned from Iraq, are being rehabilitated and re-educated against Islamic extremism and terrorism. The SAG has invested a tremendous amount of effort in devising this non-military program to counter extremism, including a staff of 140 and an in-depth psychological study in how best to implement it.

110. (U) During the delegation's visit to this facility, the staff stressed that the theme of this program is to treat the returnees not as criminals, but as victims of al-Qaeda and radical extremism, thereby reversing the detainees, loyalties towards these groups and fostering their allegiance to the Kingdom. The halfway house is a secure MOI detention center. However, the facilities themselves, aside from the high, barbed-wire walls with outside guards, are more like a school. It is staffed by full-time psychologists and imams who conduct formal and informal classes to the returnees in a relaxed environment. The daily schedule includes religious classes, psychology classes, socialization programs, sports, and therapeutic activities (including art therapy classes and anger management training); socializing with other detainees and staff is highly encouraged, as is involvement with the detainees, families. The detainees can speak daily by phone with their families, have family visits and occasionally can visit their homes for a few days. According to the director of the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), an NGO that may speak with detainees according the assurances on treatment given to the U.S. by the SAG, the NSHR can visit this facility. The halfway house staff appears to play

several roles effectively, providing training, therapy, and religious education working diligently to orient the returnees away from radical extremism; fostering greater respect and loyalty to the Kingdom, the King, and the MOI; and helping them begin to re-establish normal lives after years in detention and supporting terrorism either domestically in Saudi Arabia or abroad in Afghanistan or Iraq. After release from the Halfway House, the staff keep in contact with the former detainee and his family about once a week, including occasional visits to the detainees, homes.

This enables them to ensure that all post-release reintegration needs are being met, and that the detainee is not reverting to a takfiri or terrorist ideology.

¶11. (S) According to the MOI, six groups of former Guantanamo detainees, totaling approximately 84 individuals, have participated in the rehabilitation program at the half-way house. The first four groups, totaling approximately 52 former detainees, have completed the program, while the two most recent groups of former detainees, totaling 32 individuals, are still enrolled. All former Guantanamo detainees who have been released from custody are being monitored by the MOI with the help of their families. Three groups of internal detainees, totaling 38 individuals, have also participated in the rehabilitation program. 25 have completed the program and been released, and 13 are still enrolled. The first three groups of Guantanamo detainees returned to Saudi Arabia, who were released from MOI custody before the start of this program, were recalled to Riyadh to undergo an abbreviated version of this program.

MEETING FORMER GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

¶12. (S) Part of the visit included meeting with detainees who had been part of the rehabilitation program, including former Guantanamo detainees. The team met four on the first day (three former Guantanamo detainees, including Abdul Karim al-Bukhari and Jumaa al-Dossari, and one who had fought in Iraq. Ahmed al-Shay,a) and approximately 15 on the second day (of whom 11 were former Guantanamo detainees). This was the first such opportunity for U.S. officials to meet and talk with detainees who had been returned to Saudi custody. The detainees included both those who had completed the program and those who were still in it. The demeanor of the detainees we saw ranged from polite, but quiet and sullen, to

RIYADH 00002515 004 OF 005

effusive, warm and friendly. Many engaged in open conversation, espousing a desire to live peacefully. When commenting on their time at Guantanamo, all universally stated that they do not focus on the past, but look to the future. In a few instances, where a returned detainee was willing to say more, they noted what they disliked about their detention was the general isolation, loneliness and uncertainty of detention. Some stated they were duped by Al-Qaeda and now resented its un-Islamic activities. Ahmed al-Shay,a was a 23-yr old Saudi who went to Iraq, who was subsequently captured after his Al-Qaeda handler had him unknowingly drive a suicide truck bomb that was prematurely detonated resulting in nearly fatal injuries, including his hands suffering disfiguring burns.

¶13. (S) MOI officials who briefed the delegation noted that they hoped to expand the program to include having reformed terrorists, such as the would-be suicide bomber mentioned above, go to high schools and other places were 15-20 year olds meet, to discuss how they had been lured into terrorist activities with false promises and how they had wasted part of their lives. The SAG has already made a video of the Iraqi bomber that has been shown to television audiences throughout Saudi Arabia. Ultimately, the goal is not only to de-radicalize current terrorists, but to prevent impressionable youth from becoming terrorists in the first place.

MOI ON REHABILITATION PROGRAM AND SHAKIR AMIR

¶14. (S) The visit concluded with a frank and positive, late-night meeting with Assistant Minister for Security Affairs Prince Muhammad bin Nayif (MBN). MBN described the MOI's rehabilitation program as the right thing to do now as it would defuse the recruitment time bomb. Because the program has such wide societal buy in - family, tribes, communities, government - MBN believes it is reducing the potential terrorist threat, especially in the long-term. He noted that in the view of the Ministry, all of the detainees from Guantanamo, including those scheduled for return in the final transfer group, had the potential for reform and reintegration. MBN lamented that other nations do not have similar programs like the Saudis. When asked whether the SAG could help fellow Arab nations develop similar programs, MBN responded that these countries, particularly Yemen, have little interest in conducting such type of programs. However, he agreed that Saudi officials should share information about their rehabilitation program with ROYG counterparts and other government officials in the region; they will consider hosting a conference on the topic early next year. When asked whether the SAG might take Yemeni detainees in Guantanamo with close family ties to Saudi Arabia, MBN said this would not be possible, primarily for domestic political reasons.

¶15. (S) The U.S. delegation pressed MBN to accept the return of Guantanamo detainee and British resident Shakir Amir to Saudi Arabia. MBN indicated the KSA would not take him unless Amir submitted a written statement that he was willing to return to Saudi Arabia. His reluctance was based largely on concerns raised by MOI lawyers about potential litigation in the UK and the negative press associated with such litigation. MBN noted that the MOI is familiar with Amir's attorney and, therefore, wants a written guarantee that Amir wishes to be returned Kingdom instead of the UK (where he has residency). MBN also indicated concern over the possible effect a public dispute could have on SAG-UK bilateral relations. The delegation emphasized that HMG had already conveyed their support for sending him to Saudi Arabia, but MBN remained non-committal. He did, however, agree to look for other ways this issue might be resolved. He was clear that the SAG will accept Amir if he wishes to return to Saudi Arabia.

SAUDI REHABILITATION - LOOKS LIKE ITS WORKING

¶16. (S) COMMENT. The Saudis went to great lengths to demonstrate the effort they are putting into their

RIYADH 00002515 005.2 OF 005

rehabilitation program and its success to date, seeking to assuage both our security and human rights concerns. It was clearly evident that the program and its directors have support at high levels of the Al Saud, starting with Prince Muhammad bin Naif, and that this support will ensure it remains a key component of the Kingdom's counter-radicalization efforts. This rehabilitation program augmenting the de-radicalization program, which was begun in 2003, shows promise in effectively combating terrorism with education rather than force. The Saudis are committing significant resources to re-educate former extremists, with a fair amount of success thus far. MOI will still closely track those it eventually releases to ensure they do not return to jihad. The Saudis do acknowledge, nonetheless, that truly hard-core extremists may require long-term detention. But, according to them, better the Guantanamo detainees are in Saudi rather than U.S. hands, because this reduces al-Qaeda's ability to use Guantanamo as a recruiting tool. The program's ultimate goal is to dry up al-Qaeda recruitment and effectively prevent young Saudi men from

becoming radicalized, while also reducing familial, tribal and community support of individuals who do turn to extremism. The biggest apparent benefit, and the Saudi,s main intent, is to ensure the SAG continues to address the challenge of combating extremist ideology within the Kingdom. Thus far, the program appears to be having its desired effect. END COMMENT.

FRAKER